



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Thomas F. O'Mara

## O'Mara honoring WWII veteran from Yates County: Richard T. "Dick" Gillespie selected for induction into the NYS Veterans' Hall of Fame (WATCH today's virtual ceremony)

THOMAS F. O'MARA November 11, 2021

| ISSUE: **VETERANS HALL OF FAME**

We take this opportunity to salute lives of service to our local communities, our state, and the United States of America.

**Penn Yan, N.Y., November 11**—State Senator Tom O'Mara (R,C,I-Big Flats) today will induct **Richard T. "Dick" Gillespie of Penn Yan**, a veteran of World War II, into the New York State Senate Veterans' Hall of Fame.

Gillespie will represent O'Mara's 58<sup>th</sup> Senate District and be among approximately 60 veterans from throughout the state being inducted into the Hall of Fame this year.

Prior to COVID-19, inductees were honored at an in-person awards ceremony and reception at the Legislative Office Building in Albany.

The 2021 Veterans Hall of Fame inductees will be honored through a virtual ceremony that will be launched on Thursday, November 11, beginning at 11:00AM, to coincide with Veterans Day.

View the 2021 Veterans' Hall of Fame virtual induction ceremony and read more about all of this year's inductees here: <https://www.nysenate.gov/honoring-our-veterans>

O'Mara said, "It's a great honor and a privilege to induct Dick Gillespie into the Senate Veterans' Hall of Fame to help ensure that he will be remembered for generations to come as an outstanding New York State veteran. It's a well-deserved and well-earned tribute. We take this opportunity to salute lives of service to our local communities, our state, and the United States of America. Dick Gillespie courageously and remarkably served our nation as part of the Greatest Generation and then returned home where he worked to strengthen his community, including right here in Yates County over the past two decades. It has been a life well lived and I am glad to take this chance to express our collective gratitude and respect to Dick and his family."

Yates County Legislator P. Earle Gleason, former and longtime director of the Yates County Veterans' Service Agency, whom O'Mara inducted into the Veterans' Hall of Fame in 2016, nominated Gillespie for this year's recognition.

The Senate established its online Veterans' Hall of Fame in 2005 and, including this year, has inducted nearly 500 veterans. The Hall salutes New York veterans for their service in the United States Armed Forces and their civilian accomplishments.

View Dick Gillespie's Hall of Fame page [HERE](#).

Dick Gillespie was born on August 14, 1921 in Fulton, New York.

Interested in aviation from a young age, after graduating high school he began studying engineering at Syracuse University and, in 1941, earned his pilot's license through the Federal Civilian Pilot Training Program.

To serve his nation in World War II, Dick interrupted his studies and enlisted in the military in 1943. He was assigned to the U.S. Army Air Corps' 447<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group, 8<sup>th</sup> Air Force. He flew a B-17 Boeing Bomber (known as the "Flying Fortress") on 21 missions over Germany, leading a nine-man crew through what was called "flak alley." He piloted the lead bomber on his last ten missions and never lost a plane to enemy fire.

Among other commendations, he earned three Bronze Service Stars, the World War II Victory Medal, Air Medal, and the Distinguished Flying Cross for leading a bombing mission that destroyed a Nazi jet airbase.

Soon after Germany surrendered in 1945, Dick led a large formation of B-17s on an aerial victory tour of Europe with officers and ground crew members onboard.

He was honorably discharged in November 1945 with the rank of First Lieutenant.

Dick and his wife Jean (Ellsworth) returned to their hometown of Fulton. He became Syracuse University's first Aeronautical Engineering graduate in 1948. Instead of pursuing an aviation career, he served in the Air Force Reserve and ran the family's popular milk processing and delivery business with Jean and their four sons.

Upon retiring, Dick and Jean moved to Florida. They relocated to Penn Yan, New York in 1999 where Dick served on the Board of the First Presbyterian Church and volunteered with Meals on Wheels and at the Yates Community Center, among others. In 2014, he was named Volunteer of the Year by the Yates County Cultural and Recreation Center.

In the fall of 2013, Dick joined 11 other World War II-era veterans from Penn Yan as part of an Honor Flight to the nation's capital.

Dick continues to reside in Yates County and celebrated his 100th birthday earlier this summer on August 14th.

O'Mara's previous Veterans' Hall of Fame inductees were:

- > in 2011, Philip C. Smith, a highly decorated Korean War combat veteran and well-known figure in Schuyler County government and veterans' affairs;
- > in 2012, J. Arthur "Archie" Kieffer, a World War II combat veteran and a widely admired fixture in Chemung County government as the Chemung County historian;
- > in 2013, Painted Post Mayor and World War II combat veteran Roswell L. "Roz" Crozier, Jr.;
- > in 2014, Anthony J. "Tony" Specchio, Sr., a distinguished Korean War veteran and widely respected for his long-standing and active service to veterans and government in Watkins Glen and throughout Schuyler County;
- > in 2016, P. Earle Gleason, a lifelong Yates County resident and longtime director of the Yates County Veterans' Service Agency;
- > in 2018, Warren A. Thompson, a lifelong Steuben County resident and farmer, and a stalwart in the county's civic and veterans affairs; and
- > in 2019, Paul C. "Digger" Vendetti of Elmira, a World War II United States Navy veteran and longtime caretaker at Woodlawn National Cemetery.

Other area veterans who are Hall of Fame members are Frank C. "Fritz" Pesesky, a veteran of World War II and former director of the Chemung County Veterans Service Office (2005); William K. Kastner, a Vietnam veteran and longtime director of the Steuben County Veterans Service Agency (2006); and Robert Laskaris, a highly decorated combat veteran and

well-known figure in Chemung County veterans' affairs (2008).